

106240 - Camp Navajo Wherry Housing

Contributed by Larry Flatau
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In January 2004, the Army's Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management issued a directive to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), to dispose of sixty-nine Wherry Housing Units located at the Camp Navajo Army Depot in Bellemont, Arizona as soon as possible.

The units were built in the mid-1950's to house active-duty U.S. military personnel and their families on the installation during a then-existing housing shortage. As the mission and status of Camp Navajo evolved, the need to house active-duty personnel dwindled and ultimately disappeared. Currently, the military and the National Guard have no need for the housing units. Given that the United States has no requirement for these structures. They must be removed from the government's inventory.

Camp Navajo is currently operated by the Arizona National Guard as a National Guard training site and storage depot. Today, National Guard soldiers and civilians occupy 84% of the houses; eleven of the sixty-nine units are vacant.

In June 2004, the (Army) Office of General Counsel concluded that the tenants at Camp Navajo Wherry Housing would be entitled to relocation assistance and benefits under the terms of Public Law 91-646, provided they had not planned to move and had already given notice of their intent to vacate at the expiration of their sublease.

One of USACE's critical missions includes support to our military. The Corps designs and manages construction for homes, schools, hospitals, day care centers, office buildings, airfields, warehouses and ranges, as well as urban training facilities. The Corps also buys, manages and disposes of land for the Army and Air Force.

Relocation and realty specialists will work to ensure that the tenants at Camp Navajo experience minimal disruption during their relocation to alternate housing. A tenant's personal situation may warrant flexibility in the date when they are required to vacate their homes.

The final phase of this project involves the demolition of the existing housing and the transfer of the vacant land to the National Guard. This will occur only after all tenants have been relocated. Additionally, a pre-demolition hazardous material study must be completed and a demolition contract must be awarded.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Located in Bellemont, Arizona, Camp Navajo, formerly the Navajo Depot Activity, is operated by the Arizona National Guard as a National Guard training site and storage depot. In 1993, the Department of Defense discontinued the U.S. Army federal ammunition mission at the Navajo Depot Activity and licensed the installation to the Arizona National Guard (AZNG). The real estate (land) and many of the buildings (including the Wherry units) are owned by the United States.

The Camp Navajo Wherry Housing consists of sixty-nine (69) housing units, which include one-bedroom duplexes and two and three bedroom stand-alone units, together with a number of free-standing, multi-car garage structures at Camp Navajo. The units were originally built upon 19 acres of wooded land by a private [operator/landlord] developer/lessee in the mid-1950's to house soldiers stationed at the Navajo Army Depot located at Camp Navajo in Bellemont, Arizona. The operator's lease was for 75 years, but cancelable by the government at any time after 50 years, 6 months (22 April 2003).

As of 24 March 2004 the tenant family demographics for the 58 occupied units consisted of eight (8) deployed Guardsmen; one (1) active duty Military (Army ROTC); four (4) Guardsmen; seven (7) State Technicians employed at the Depot; two (2) Federal Technicians employed at the Depot; one (1) retired Military; and thirty-five (35) civilians.

The 69, fifty year old, housing units were constructed at Camp Navajo to house active duty U.S. military personnel and their families on military installations during the then-existing national housing shortage. Special legislation provided for financing through the Federal Housing Administration (now HUD). For this particular project, the land was leased to the developer for \$100 per year for a fixed term of 50 years and 6 months. After that time, which ended in April 2003, the lease was terminable as long as the FHA

(HUD) was no longer involved. The lease provided for the developer to build, operate, and maintain the housing units, receiving all of the rent generated by the housing. The original developer had financial difficulties. HUD stepped in and eventually replaced the operator of the housing with the current operator, Bruskin.

HISTORY:

Camp Navajo was originally established as Navajo Ordnance Depot in 1942. The original mission called for storage of ammunition in support of the Pacific Theater of operations during the Second World War.

Changes in status and mission have resulted in the name of the installation evolving from Navajo Ordnance Depot to Navajo Army Depot in 1965, Navajo Depot Activity in 1982, and finally in 1993, Camp Navajo. The installation has been in continuous operation since 1942.

The Wherry Housing units were to be leased to military personnel, with a proviso allowing the lessee to lease to non-military in the event the military failed to designate military tenants.

The units became the property of the Government upon completion of construction.

While the accountability for the housing does not appear to be recorded on the National Guard inventory under the license with the United States, ultimately the ownership of the property is vested in the United States.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

1. Why are civilians and soldiers being removed from the Camp Navajo Wherry Housing units?

Camp Navajo Wherry Housing was originally intended to house military personnel. Over time the base utilization requirement has changed. The facility is no longer an active-duty Army base with a need to house soldiers. Since there is no longer a need for Army housing, the military can no longer continue to expend funds that are needed elsewhere.

2. If the housing has not been a requirement for several years, why is USACE just now starting to relocate the tenants?

The first opportunity we had to terminate the lease was in April 2003. Since that time USACE has been considering how best to proceed. The Corps has been working on a plan that will have the least disruptive effect on the residents.

3. Will eviction procedures be needed?

Eviction procedures will only be necessary if tenants refuse to move. Eviction can be considered, but only as a last resort.

4. What happens if a tenant decides he/she may not want to relocate?

Once the tenants at Camp Navajo review and understand the relocation entitlements, USACE believes they will accept the benefits and move willingly. This has been the government's experience in the past.

If there is someone who chooses not to move we cannot make exceptions for those individuals. The needs of the project must be met. The housing units must be demolished because they have outlived their usefulness to the Army.

Eviction would be a last resort.

5. Why aren't the houses being renovated?

The army is not in the business of providing housing for civilians. While Camp Navajo is not an active Army installation, it is still being used for military purposes. It is currently a National Guard installation.

If and when the property is no longer used for military purposes it is required to be returned to the U.S. Forest Service.

6. Will there be any financial assistance to help the residents move?

The residents are entitled to relocation benefits under Public Law 91-646. The dollar amount of those benefits will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The Corps of Engineers has experienced relocation specialists who will meet individually with each household to determine the entitlement for that individual household.

7. What will happen to the site where the housing currently sits?

The housing will be demolished and the vacant land will be subject to use by the National Guard.

STAKEHOLDERS:

Current Tenants of the Wherry Housing units:

Guardsman
Active Duty Military (Army ROTC)
State Employees
Federal Employees
Retired Military
Civilians

Local Community members (Camp Navajo) Arizona Army National Guard

LTC Peter Tosi
Garrison Commander
Peter.Tosi@az.ngb.army.mil
<http://www.camp-navajo.org>

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES:

U.S. Senator John McCain
<http://mccain.senate.gov/>

U.S. Senator Jon Kyl
<http://kyl.senate.gov>

Arizona State Governor
Janet Napolitano
<http://www.governor.state.az.us>

City of Flagstaff - Mayor
Joseph "Joe" C. Donaldson

PHOTOS:

Camp Navajo (Click to enlarge)

RELATED LINKS:

<http://www.camp-navajo.org>

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